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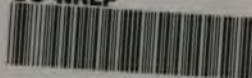
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JOHN MASTERS

AMTRICAL WARD

KENNETH CAMPBELL





JOHN MASTERSON;
OR,

Passion and The Priest

95

A METRICAL NARRATIVE

BY

KENNETH CAMPBELL

SAN DIEGO
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TO THE
ALMA MATER

Class of 1887

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DEDICATION
—
TO MY MOTHER

740007

FOREWORD

Since Time began, one of man's most heart-bleeding, sternest wars has been the conflict between the love instinct, the mating of the sexes, and the interference of parental and other outside adjustment; between the laws of convention and rebellious native instincts. John Masterson was a victim of both, and it is his soul struggle in this world-old strife that I have sought to portray in terms of emotion.

THE AUTHOR.

Sacramento, California.

I.

LA JOLLA—1913

MAY

Forgetfulness, ah that is more
Than Memory; the Gone Before,
The Lost to lose—that were a power
To gild with bliss the bleakest hour.—
In work I cannot sink the past:
The dreams of Night must lower at last.
I sleep, but day for me begins
And preying Thought, vampirish, wins!—

Aileen! A name that lives like myrrh
In Urns of Memory; I may not slur
My lady lost, of gentle will;
Too strange her love—I love her still!
Her beauty is my nocturne's wraith!
I fight, I fight, to hold my faith:
For if I lose that, I am lost,
A cynic soul, in self engrossed.—

I sit within the gloomed embrasure
Of the cliff; the surf's erasure
Blots out each message on the sand
Below, with paced recurrence bland.
The Moon hath laid her Rug of Flame
Across the Sea; 'twas so she came
Into my life, too soon away,
In Beauty as Dian astray.

Her father with his millions heaped
Where weaklings at his bidding leaped,
With domination overbore
My landless love—to me his door

Was locked with triple links of steel;
His lackeys' arrogance I feel
Unto this night. My scorned dismissal
Was followed by Aileen's epistle:

"'Tis best we never meet again;
I fight my father's will in vain."—

This ring that binds my smallest finger
She sent; our first embraces linger
In visions when my day is done,
But she, my love, my life, is gone!

II.

JUNE

I.

A green cove all a pulsing blur
Of lightless sound by night,
Save when the lunar breezes stir
From depths of soundless light,
By day a blaze of beryl and of blue;
The sounding surf, the fifing mew.

2.

The waves, the breezes, sing "Aileen"
To one who can't forget;
The crinkling swells in fitful sheen
Are pens that write it yet.
To me, to me they spell "A-i-l-e-e-n,"
My first, my last, my joy, my teen!

3.

The bathers lance the bellowing foam
With spear-point hands, or lie
In sands, or idly cliffward roam,
Where spume-tossed opals fly
And shatter to a futile spray
As broke a dream of mine one day.

4.

One of the gay and one apart
Idly I plied the sand,
Which shifted as a woman's heart,
I thought, and with my hand
Destroyed the fabrics that I wrought—
When far-flung fear seaward I caught.

5.

A woman's agony can pierce
The sentient ear of man
And nerve him with a spirit fierce
As moved the primal clan
To meet the monsters of the cave—
Responding, swift I fought the wave.

6.

It seemed the rigor of my soul
Resolved in lenient joy;
'Twas not I sought the hero's role,
That egoist's alloy
Of selfish aim and Gascon pride:
'Twas that I hungered to be tried.

7.

My hands locked strands of gold-wet hair;
The face was pallid under;
And lo! There lay that Aileen there!
Again must dull Fate blunder?
The weird three sisters mix the cards
And oddly heap the human shards?

8.

I swam with my lax love ashore,
The clamor of the throng
Unheard, and to the lee I bore
Her from the wild surf-song
Below a rock; her eyelids stirred:
"Aileen!" I cried—that fateful word!

9.

And ere the prattling gossips came,

She smiled and sighed with me:
Precluded passion leaped to flame—
And only I was free!—
“ beloved,” was all she said,
Ere memory again had fled.

10.

They bore her to the bungalow,
Her sumptuous Summer eyrie;
And That has intervened, I know,
Will make my lot less dreary:
These barriers of the social laws
Are reared to give the timid pause.

11.

For she is mated with a pang
Encarnalized, a thorn,
That pierces as the serpent's fang;
Where love lives not, the scorn
Of her pure mind for such as he
Who purchased her, turns inwardly.

12.

She scorns herself as one of those
Nomads of the street,
Who never bask in love's repose,
Nor learn its duties sweet—
Incarnate sacrifice to pride,
The Vestal flame within her died.

13.

Convention ever stones to death
The unsafeguarded Phryne:
But wedded goods is spared foul breath—
As though the guilt were tiny
That welds two lives where love is not
And one remembers—unforgot!

14.

What barrier should there be to love
Such as binds her to me?

Mine ark is beached; I've launched a dove
To find a nascent tree,
Then bring to me the herald twig;
The world is small; the heart is big!

III.

JULY

1.

I am martial today in my delight,
For the brimming is mine without measure;
The chill shadows are fled in a night;
All the day is but votive to pleasure;
And I'll wander the canyon's cool maze
Through the manifold beauteous hours,
Where the crimson poinsettias blaze.
Oh for me the militant flowers!

2.

March, march, march, with your sword, whitest
soldiers
Of the chaparral, parading the slope;
Spanish bayonets, how firmly you hold yours;
White, white, forever my hope!
And ever I know that the Summer
Will die in your withering arms;
Today you are routing the mummer,
And the scyther is hid with his harms,

3.

While the woodpecker hammers his drum;
Vitality, action, delight,
Virility, fervor now come,
In spirit until the rich night:
For my fairest is stealing to meet me
In a dell by a musical stream;
She is coming to thank and entreat me
To go, to forgive and—to dream!

IV.

Perplexities assail the finite thought
Of man; he has been born to doubt.
When fervor passes and the morning calm
And drab has sunk from night's jet store,
How slowly click the cams of introspection,
Remorseless as the mill stones of the gods,
Till each indissoluble deed is tossed
Aside by force that grinds in vain,
To crush it for the mind's digestion I
To-day am teeming with the vain employment.
What wrecks of wild convention are we all!
Wild as the frigid, molar Arctic Waste!
Tradition racks the woman's blinded feet
And warps the thought of superstitious man.
But in a moment's wild rebellion, all
Restrictions of the Cheops-mummy past
Are disentangled: vividly the Now.
The instant moment's fiery passion burns
Athwart the bandages that calm discretion
All piously enwrapped about the soul,
And wildly rejuvescent, stifled flames
Consume all usage—gone Religion's ban,
Lost fear of pointing fingers and forgot
Is Conscience, spirit monitor and law,
That ebbs before the vital sun of Love!

. She came as Dian from the splendor trod
The flower-singing way unto her shepherd,
Mad sweetly sung of Keats, Endymion.
The silken filminess of her green gown,
Ethereal, was intermingled in
The moon-glazed background of the glade,
Where carpeting eyes of the ice-plant wept
For her glad beauty. I may not list

As in a catalogue the things she said—
Sweet volubilities of past, dear days,
And praise and gratitude for my small deed
Of rescue—ever holding well aloof
From perilous allusion to her state
Of marriage with the wealthy lecher whom
She loathed; and vaguest tints athwart her face
And glints within her eyes, revealed the fears
And sorrows felt, when pensive silence fell.
But time so fled before our happiness
By contrast with our sorrow trebly sweet—
Thus so because we sensed it to be transient
From the Sibyl voices, psychic, of the soul—
That the round moon had plumbed her arc of sad
And ebon sky and overhung the canyon scarp
In melancholy, luminous farewell,
Ere half the banal sweets of speech were tasted,
That lacked the pith but had the sound of meaning.
It was that which she did not say that spake
The loudest, thus: "I love you," though no nun
Ere kept more strictly all proprieties
Until—ah God—there fell a drench of sound
Through all that mystic mountain majesty,
Where, maddened by the soul of Sappho, sang
A morbid mocking bird whose aching throat
Seemed bursting to empress the passion pent
Within his frenzy rapt, high-soaring soul.

* * * *

And weeping, though a willing "wronged Lucrece,"
She sent me from her beauteous side, to meet—
Where? When?—We twain by Nature's in-
 stinct tied,
By man-made error kept apart as long
As her forbidding faith ententacled
Her heart with duteous fear.

V.

SACRAMENTO—TWO YEARS LATER

JANUARY

1.

Human life should not be known in years,
But in terms of feeling; smiles and tears,
Thoughts, dreams, joy, despair, love, hate, hopes
and fears.

2.

Our emotions are the shifting tones
Of the song of Time, and they are stones
Whose suppression hearing never owns.

3.

Acts are but the progeny of these,
Are the many infants on the knees
Of the gods, whose whims their puppets please.

4.

Phases of my groping life's career
Through the bitter, sweet, the lush, the sere.
Flow in numbers, as emotions veer.

5.

Calm, majestic, through the rifted brake,
From the dome I see the river take
Turbidly its way, a moving lake.

6.

So my life these months has gloomed and gone
Down a river never sunned upon,
As the hidden Alph, earth under, drawn!

VI.
JUNE

1.

Yet now the elms mirror a greener shade,
Whose interlacing limbs, a cool arcade,
In Summer's torrid waste, adown the street
Have tented for toil a vocal promenade,
Orchestral with the lilt of blithesome birds,
Whose operas lose not for lack of words.

2.

Hydrangias weave in winds with fresher hope
On every shaded lawn, or sunny slope;
The daisies and the dahlias brighter greet;
The tendrils of the ivy peakward grope
With more exalted striving to mine eyes,
To-day made all alert from quaint surprise.

3.

A new strangeness—there came to me a line,
From Aileen, pithy, sad, and yet divine,
The first from her in all these days
Restrained and sorrowful—the child is mine;
With Nature's true design, delineation
Depicts distinct to her too fond creation.

4.

It cannot be exuberance I feel,
But that which comes at night to those who kneel;
A stern joy, deeply sacred feeling sways;
Perhaps such as to martyrs ere the wheel
Revolved, which menaced them with hoarded
pain,
Designed by tyrant, zealously insane.

5.

This life of my life is to me denied
By canons of propriety and pride;
Avowal of paternity would be a sin,

A crime unto the innocent, beside
Which, sacrifice of native yearnings wild,
Is duty to the mother and the child.

6.

The world has no suspicion, wrote Aileen,
Though nuances of such she late had seen,
Mere flickers of a puzzled doubt within
Her husband's stolid heart, disturb his mien—
No tender traits revealed parental bliss,
No baby slang, no proudly loving kiss.

VII.

PATERNAL LOVE

1.

Dear little baby of mine,
Whence came thy Cupid's bow coral?
Who could have painted thine eyen
With the blue of the deepest dyes floral?
Oh, I know, I know! 'Twas thy mother
And the Spirit of Love, and none other!

2.

Who could have rapt from the rose
Her delicate pink for thy cheeks,
And the stainless delight of the snows
From Sierra's inviolate peaks?
It is plain, it is plain! 'Twas thy mother
And the Spirit of Love, and none other!

3.

Whence, pretty fairy, thy smile,
The bitterest wight to disarm?
And thy gurglings that evil beguile
To become thy warder from harm?
My heart tells, my heart tells! 'Twas thy
mother
And the Spirit of Love, and none other.

VIII.
THE RIVER
JULY

1.

The steamer swings into the morning mist,
Now rising o'er the river;
The drawbridge strains its ponderous bulk atwist;
There is a constant quiver,
A regulated cadence fore and aft,
The beating of the heart within the craft.

2.

The pilot steers a serpentine course
From bank to bank and center,
Familiar with the channel from its source
To where the salt-tides enter.—
And I am swept along o'er unknown seas,
My only log-book one of memories.

3.

Aileen is on the boat and by my side,
And with her tiny Helen;
From whom as many walls and gulfs divide
As if I were a felon.
She had been welcomed by a valley friend
And to her "master's" side her ways now tend

4.

The meeting is not chance, but prearranged
And lasts but for the journey;
Her "Sultan's" love is now somewhat estranged,
And though he would be stern, he
Succeeds in being only brutal, till
He rouses all the woman of her will.

5.

I quarrel not with fervor, faith and creed,
The trusses of religion,

For millions find they fill a yearning need
To rest a hopeful bridge on
Into the Future and its hidden ways,
Where mortal nights become immortal days.

6.

The day on which this in my diary goes
Finds me a firm agnostic,
An open mind that only one thing knows:
That Fate to him is caustic,
And that he would not lay the guilt on God.
But puppets, who, as pulls convention, nod.

7.

But Aileen is of that devoted Faith
Through which the bond of marriage
Forever knits, until the husband's death
Shall terminate miscarriage
Of that most well intended, futile plan
Which puts a better mating 'neath the ban

8.

HER sin was in her yield—but *cui bono*?
The past is passed forever;
She shall not fill the fate of Desdemona
To his Othello—never!
Of this she gravely spoke, and of her fears,
So palely brave, repressing natural tears.

9.

And though my heart was desolate, bereft
Of all that makes life matter,
And only lees of bitter rue were left,
I could not think to shatter
The decalogue her church prescribed for her;
Agnostic, yet HER Faith I must not stir.

10.

"He dreads the scandal of divorce in selfish pride,"
She said, "not for my feeling.
He fears the gossip tongues that would deride,
The hidden blot revealing,
For he is one who bears an ancient name
That must not be besmirched by public shame.

11.

"But many savage slights he heaps on me
Within our life domestic.
And oh that I again were free!"
The day marched on, majestic.
The willows and the cottonwoods retreated
Along the banks, as warriors defeated.

12.

Night rode down day upon a vaulting gale,
Tanged with the salt of ocean;
The genius breath of tragedy; the pale
Dusk sipped its potion
Of red wine from the beaker of the sun;
Revived, the stars peeped, timid, one by one.

13.

The moon had hung a demi-disk of snow
In icy far serenity,
But now she gained a luminescent glow,
A languid, lorn amenity,
As if she tended Man to shepherd
Him from the Hate that makes of Law a
leopard.

14.

Ahead, the jagged bastions of Diabalo
Seemed progress interposing,

Lit by the waning sunset's winy glow,
An awful fortress closing;
And then the river made a sudden turn,
As motion learns fixed obstacles to spurn.

15.

The river finds a level in the sea,
Through many tortured mazes,
And this a symbol Sybillene to me;
My life's entrammeled phases
Will one day merge into the primal vast—
Or will it into purest day have passed?

16.

I left Aileen and Helen safe aboard
The steamer for the southland;
Though all the man within me mad implored
For love, with firm set mouth and
Factitious calm I bade them both farewell.
Aileen and I each knew a different hell.

17.

Hers was the Hades of the after-death,
All blasting fire and fury,
Save for the Purgatorial mercy-breath
Of an Archangel jury.
Mine was the Sheol of the thwarted now—
Convention's Crown of Thorns, Love's Bleed-
ing Brow!

18.

One life frowned 'twixt a present Heav'n and me,
I mused, in hopeless brooding;
His icy interposing mastery,
Law-sanctioned, right eluding.
Of two souls' happiness were never fled,
By Aileen's code—until he join the dead.

IX.

THE PRIMITIVE—ONE YEAR LATER.

1.

Can this be happiness here in the cool and shady glamour,
Out of the harsh domain where on the racks of trade men clamor?
The primitive simplicity of this benignant wood
Uncrucifies from ivied bole, the passion of the rood.
All graced about with messengers of healing peace and balm;
Here life pervades with all the grandeur of Creation's calm.

2.

We've builded up a wattled cot, pavilioned by the boughs,
Aeolian hung, of harps among the Dryads' peeping brows.
It lies within a sheltered dell, a haven in the hills,
Anear the everlasting swell and metronoming spills
Of icy water o'er a granite plunge, a pine-high scarp;
As veers, or rests the fitful wind, its clang is dull or sharp.

3.

Barbaric cruelties, refinements of the subtle art
Of innuendo and the torture of a wincing heart,
Aileen had borne until the buyer of her freedom stepped
Beyond the limits of the ills of woman once outwept.
Beyond the toleration that her Master's faith demanded,
Unto such tortures, unescaped, as mankind makes red-handed.

4.

So that in wild revolt she left the hated nuptial bed;
With Helen joined me, and despair into the forest led;
Sequestered from the hounding of the Puritanic clan
That on discovered sinnings only burns the scarlet ban;
Reversing epic origin that Christians find their creed in,
We've fled from worldly woes into this high-embowered Eden.

X.

PREMONITION

Sweet purple-hearted pimpernel,
But vermeil as an ocean shell
 Upon thy petal fringes,
In thee perceptive instincts dwell;
Detecting ere slow senses tell
A coming storm, thy closing bell
 With omen fancy tinges.

And as thy furling sepals so
My dreams their prescient shuttings know,
 As of impending crashes,
When lancing rains the paths shall strew
With ravished lilies' ruined snow:
And lightnings torch the thunder throe
 Till strife torrential dashes.

What wonder as the spirit sees
Such vision, then to still hearts'-ease
 It bends sad glances burning.
Ah, sacred flow'ret, born to please,
Thy innocence my fever frees,
Thy healing nod, thy calm decrees,
 Some shimmer of truth discerning!

XI.

THE PRIEST OF GATH

I.

Within the wildest ways that men
Have trod, far from the grave-like den
Of coded tyranny, I roamed in chase
Of deer and game; or scanned the face
Of waters clear to diamond deeps,
The icy pools, where, pining, sleeps,
Narcissus of the marble heart,
But mine the trout-enticer's part:
Or mountain dainties far I sought
For those within our lone love cot.

2.

Day unto day uttereth bliss
And timeless love rains kiss on kiss.
Aileen's pale beauty bloomed to joy
Near perfect, which could never cloy,
Forsooth we knew not when the day
Should dawn, when snatched the cup away,
And shivered the chime's cerulean tones,
The righteous people and their stones
Should burst into our Eden sweet
And chain us to their penance seat.

3.

One eve I found a man whose moan
Bespoke dire need; he'd fallen prone
Upon an obscure mountain path;
I learned him as the Priest of Gath,
For he was one who'd sworn a vow
To storm sin's citadel somehow.
A pulmonary plaint impelled

Him to the solitude; he dwelled
Within a grove of pine and fir
Where constant healing spirits stir.

4.

We nursed him to a semblance of
His former self; he sunned his love
Upon us, warm and pure and bright,
As calm as sacred thoughts at night—
A holy man, if ever such
Since Christ and His redeeming touch,
And frequent strove he to recast
My creedless shoon to his own last,
And sorrowful, he heard our story,
As one who grieves for glooming glory.

5.

"Father," I said, "if God were good,
If such there were, he never would
Have turned awry the hearts of men,
Who merely sordid motives ken.
He never would see women sold
Upon the block for lecher's gold
And merit crushed by greedy power,
Nor slavery the poor man's dower,
Nor Nations vampire Nations' blood
And glut upon the reeking flood."

6.

"Yet love will conquer all the world,"
He calmly said. "Too near us whirled
Are vast events, to view the whole,
Or we should see as good the goal
Of this world in the universe;
Faith will your darkling doubts disperse."
And ever toiled he to recall
Aileen to be religion's thrall
So that uneasy fears I knew
Lest she return to churchly rue.

XI.
THE PIT

1.

It was as if we two were slaves
Of law and domineering knaves,
By Circumstance set up as master
Whom to defy egged on Disaster:
As if a momentary respite
Were ours from the pursuing despot,
But ever nearer on the wind
The baying of the chosen dinned.
Why could we not be let alone?
A damnable doctrine—the "must atone!"

2.

The Priest of Gath at length essayed
Return unto his templed glade,
There piously on saints to brood—
An outdoor priest, but not a Druid
To sacrifice young, weeping Love
And moaning incense wreaths above
The fell, red pyre; with good intent
He came into our lives and sent
Full many a pious prayer to "God"
That "He" not smite us with his "rod."

3.

There dawned a day when darkling clouds
Lay on the peaks like Titan shrouds,
The air oppressive with alarm,
So still the thin Aeolian charm
Of pine harmoniums fell mute
And louder pulsed the foaming chute.
That spilled eternal tides below,
Fed by the sun's transmuted snow.

I kissed Aileen's forebodings still
And proved the mystery of the hill.

4.

A cloudy deep unplumbed of man,
Cleft when the primal shuddering ran
Athwart Creation's rocky spine,
Breathed up miasmis as a mine,
Down which the quaking fancy peers
And Vulcan hammers faintly hears
In vast imagining of fables
Read nervously on midnight tables,
Gaped on my left hand where the trail,
But seldom used, led from the vale.

5.

The shaggy, mongrel, woody locks
Of manzanita crowned rude rocks
Of granite, like crushed heads Titanic,
Unnecked by thunderbolts tyrannic,
When raged rebellious ire of giant,
Of Jupiter's regime defiant;
And here and yon, hoary and bald,
Old skinless skulls of rock appalled
With sense of ruined past and future—
Sardonic socket and jagged suture.

6.

Long, long ago some troglodyte,
Upon the margin of the night,
Deep down into this plumbless chasm
Peering, blinked—when passed the thunder spasm
Of grinding elements—and hurled the ape
Tarpeian over, then agape,
He gazed and hearkened for a sound,
But merely awful silence round—
As yet, to-day, into the void,
War hurls her hosts to be destroyed.

7.

As spent with climbing, I rested here,

Unwelcome noises held my ear,
Stumbling of one upon the trail
Far round a rock that served to veil
The climbing traveler, and me
From him; I sensed hostility
And hid behind an aged boulder,
Colossal, yet so poised the shoulder
Might with a heave hurl it down crashing,
And over the brink send dashing and smashing.

8.

Aileen's husband, nemesis, came
To stalk me for his private game!
At last around the angle leaning,
He paused below the overweening
Fragment of the elder cliff.
One motion of my arm—if—if—
No witness to accuse—no—trace—
The plunge of Lucifer in space—
The drag upon two lives adrift—
Ah how the sands Satanic shift!

9.

The power that withheld my hand
Was more than I could understand.
It scorned a stalemate of the will.
The stone that spake: "Thou shalt not kill,"
Was but a Moses sculptored line,
Sinai-conceived, but not divine,
The interdiction of all ages
On wise, imperishable pages,
The sheep's defense against the lion,
Supernally ascribed to Zion.

10.

And still my spirit lost its blur,
My rage its momentary spur;
The Cain-red hand of hate eluded,
Like some stern statue there I brooded,
While he whose strands were interwoven

In tangled tapestry and cloven
Where mine began, in Life's skeined scheme,
Seemed some ghost figure in a dream,
While Premonition, like a vulture,
'There hovered for some vile sepulture.

11.

More tangible, but terror-fraught,
A sudden sight made polyglot
A babel of the inner voices,
From Fear to Hope—as Dawn rejoices,
In consummated deeds of night,
The man who's struggled fierce with Right
And lost, but lavish Fate, his aid,
Misfortune on his rival laid—
So o'er me transient gloating swept
At Death which on the other crept.

12.

It was a stalking mountain lion
Whose stealth disturbed no foliaged cion,
Whose yellow eyes, abhorrent, burned,
As they upon his prey were turned—
A savage symbolized cinerary,
Fuming all the hate my heart could carry.—
Unmindful of his nemesis,
(So obtuse Man's native premises)
The hunter hunted idly rested,
An easy spoil for an end detested.

13.

Again, what monitor, what hand,
What minatory, stern command;
What triumph of the Inner Spirit,
What Power made me list and hear It,
Unconceived; 'twas not my will
Which reft the lion of his kill,
Which bade me raise, and aim and fire,
To balk the beast of his desire,

Mysterious, occult ends of Fate!
Most senseless what I now narrate!

14.

For he whose life I had preserved.
Yea twice a better will deserved,
Perceiving me now half revealed
And thinking not myself to shield,
With face fear white and raw, red oath,
"Assassin!" shrieked—and ere we both
A nearing step could take, upraised
His rifle, and searing, grazed
The scoring bit of steel and lead,
A harmless pain athwart my head.

15.

And ere the maniac again
Might aim, perhaps and not in vain,
I grappled with him on the brink
Of space—the brain knows not to think
In dreams, when, falling endlessly,
The lifting nadir we can see.
To strain for epithets is vain;
I cannot conjure from my brain
Meet words; he whirled into the chasm—
It seemed a wild, dream-borne phantasm!

16.

And still no dream; his cap there lay
Upon the weapon cast in the fray.
In semi-stupor I hurled them wide
Into the maw of the mountain side,
Then shivering, hastened from the scene
To sift the sequel with Aileen:
Whether to meet the law half way
Or saving silence to obey;
And all the homeward path I heard
That poor, last, vain accusing word.

17.

When yet afar, amazed, I saw

A fitful smoke, as of wet straw,
And leaping madly through the brake,
Down tangled slopes new trails to make,
Vaulting pebbled, arid beds
Of bygone brooks and tramping heads
Of tender buds that interposed,
I came to where the chapter closed.
Our rough-hewn hut in ashes lay
Gone, gone, save dregs of dead flames, gray!

XII.

FEVER.

1.

Falling, falling, endlessly falling,
Like the flame of a shivered star:
Calling, calling, soundlessly calling,
As the dreams of a dreamer are:
Out of Orion in the aeons past
Fiery mist moths flew in the vast,
Drawing a comet's car.

2.

Into the sun from out of Orion,
The fire-moths are warming their wings;
Pinions of melody, such as Amphion
Wove on Aeolian strings;
But as Icarian, waxen were they,
Molten as snow in a premature May—
The soul falls and falls as it sings.

3.

Can there be no end to the flaming?
Can there be no floor to the fall?
Fire into water, earth aiming,
And over the craggy wall.
Down, down, down in a fuming
Quest of its rest resuming:
Awaiting Creation's call.

4.

Fire and water are living
And song is Creation's breath;
Love burning, sorrow giving
Its ashes the pit of Death.
Real or unreal this dreaming?
Seen or unseen this seeming?
No mortal thing happiness hath!

XIII.

JUDGMENT.

1.

They've called me guilty; twelve men said
The wrong of it lay on my head;
The gallows bear perennially;
No lovingkindness nurtures them;
More lethal than the upas tree,
Vile in root, branch, in bud and stem:
And I shall bloom and fade thereon,
For mercy from the world is gone.

2.

The fever left my brain next morn
And as the leper all men scorn,
Marked by the curse that blighted Job,
But lacking hope of happy end,
Upon my soul a sackcloth robe,
In vain I fevered for a friend:
The story told lacked all belief:
Men look for murder in a thief.

3.

For love illicit is a theft,
By laws transmitted from the west
Of social fabric when the clan
Decided on monogamy,
And stocks and chains were for the man

Who lived in free misogamy.
It is done well; it is done well;
But loveless marriage is a hell.

4.

And still, no more than marriageless love,
When free of fetters is the dove.

Aileen the victim was of BOTH;

On her fair head the double curse;

How beautiful the sanctioned troth!

Than love illegal, can aught be worse?

But love by gold is crucified!

Nailed on the cross, love drooped and died!

5.

My tale of self-defense was dust

Before the wind, or as the rust

That blinkards see on tarnished truth:

They made a martyr of the dead;

The living won no word of ruth;

"Hanging too good for him," they said.

And so to-morrow's morning sun

Will see the real murder done.

6.

I gaze upon thee, fading day,

Who soon resume the primal clay:

But musical the heart within,

For Aileen at the death-cell stood,

And oh, I seemed all purged of sin:

I felt the future would be good.

My baby took my praying kiss

And faith then came with flooding bliss!

7.

How I rejoice the ashes of

That hut held not the two I love!

Aileen's mad father set the fire

And with my loves departed:

And as Lot's wife looked on the pyre,

But spared, she gazed, though broken-hearted.

It was a strand within the plot:
The husband's awful night was not.

8.

Farewell, broad earth with all I love;
Farewell, hills, vales and peaks above;
Farewell, sweet flowers of the forest;
Farewell, bright songsters of the glen;
Farewell, thou sea, as foam thou pourest;
Farewell, farewell, all haunts of men;
Farewell to all; in peace I leave;
Farewell, farewell, twain hearts that grieve!

XIV. ON TAMALPAIS.

In Excelsis,
In dreams, I stood
Exalted far above the Wood:
Fir, bay, laurel, pine
Below this rocky shrine,
The flayed madrone,
As fairy shoots.
There, poised alone
Upon the fruits
Of Time's upheaval
With Cain coeval,
I read the roots
Of mysteries,
The histories
Of souls and stars
In all the graphic imagery of scars.

2.

The mist that robed
The sleeping sea
The light englobed revealed to me.
Blown o'er the minor hills—
Illusion Thought distills—
Creation rolled

As if from chaos,
Worlds manifold
Of light, to ray us,
Were spawned prolific
In beatific
Forms to dismay us.
It was Creation
And Revelation
Of God to those
Who visioned primal planetary throes.

3.

That drama vast
Awoke within
Feelings akin
To Shelley's arching thought;
Mine inner gropings sought
For words; came none!
Beyond expression!
As tremors run
In pent recession
Along mute lyres
Whose unthrummed wires
Have ta'en possession
Of inspired yearning
From vast tones turning
To slaves of waves
All vibrant atoms, e'en to Heavens architraves!

XV.

1.

So passed the glimmer of a midnight dream,
As along the Summer seas the ghostly gleam
Of some far falling meteorite lies
For one flame-penciled moment, then dies:
When up I started from waning sleep;

A palpitating fancy moved me deep:
My warders were approaching with a priest,
Ere faintly God's red stylus wrote the east.
What hastened they? Why grudged me half my vision,
To disincorporate me with elision
Of moments priceless—ere the sempiternal
And starry dial should blue to light diurnal,
And I might taste a final kissing sun
So niggardly admitted by the one
Checked casement?

Now with careful, feline tread,
The cautious footfalls hemmed my cell, and lo!
I blinked, as weak-orbed mortals at the snow,
For garishly a light was flung full on my face.
"Father!" I cried. "You come with grace!"
And then the massive bolts were shot amain,
To grate and groan as though inflicted pain
Spilled fear: I gazed and in my vision's path
I read a miracle—the Priest of Gath!

2.

A modern Paul to open prison gates!
By him to be sweet solaced, solving hates
For a prospective gallows bourgeois! I held
His kindly hand in silence and beheld
Some subtle, oriflamming radiance,
As if an aureoled Apostle did advance.
"Good Father!" raven-wise I croaked at last,
"Some marvelous illusion, or some vast,
Deceptive wile of vainly hoping thought
Writes glory in some message joy-enwrought
Upon your face!" His eyes were moistly luminous,
And ill reserved his feelings—human is
Even the man whose duties clerical
Preclude surrender to a mien hysterical.
"Reprieved," he said in that bell-voice disease
Could not deprive of all its charm to please.
"A pardon very shortly must ensue.

The Governor has signed this boon for you."
And hereupon the Captain of the Guard
With kindly speech confirmed This night bright starred
For me: the cogs of Fate at last had turned,
Reversing, for it seemed their victim spurned
Had naught of further worth in lieu of moans—
And hearts at last were living—not stones!

3.

Too tedious would it be the priestly words
To recapitulate; of all the birds
Most tiresome is the magpie, so that only
The substance I impart. That tragic, lonely
Encounter on the verge precipitous,
The Priest of Gath had seen, far over us
Ensconced within a certain beetling eyrie
That overlooked a waste of rock as dreary
As Dante's dusk Inferno, fastnesses
Profound, mysterious, and vastnesses
Of craggy, violet distance. He had sought
To follow me, but native feelings wrought
Upon his pulmonary weakness so
That, crimson from his pallid lips the flow
Ensued. He fell into a dreamless swoon,
Reviving hours later when the moon,
Serenely sheening pity, shone upon
His suffering and lighted with a wan
Effulgence all his falt'ring homeward path—
And many days the Priest of Gath
Alone fought off inexorable throes,
But still preserved the courage Vision knows,
Until his mustered strength permitted travel:
His testimony saved without a cavil.

XVI.

ANOTHER YEAR PASSES

1.

The Priest of Gath is healed and I am ill,
But not in faith of reclamation still
Of ill-starred destiny: I moiled a maze
Of disappointment many, many days
Of twisting in an inefficient search,
As one who sought a shrine rapt from a church.
State's pardon came to wash my tablets clean
And all my heart-beats pulsed into a pean
Till clashed the muting discord of a lost Aileen!

2.

A prisoner within her father's castle kept;
As many a feudal maiden once outwept
Long days; what lie he must have told her!
Forgive him? Yes. Restore the hopes that moulder?
That were another matter. Believed me dead?
Such is true solace . . . Late one night she fled.
The age is new. But Wealth is tyrant still!
As Mirabeau's own father's overweening will
By cachet dungeoned him, his rebel fire to chill.

3.

Through all the marts of men I sought her,
A Gabriel, in search of Benedict's lorn daughter.
Evangeline? I hold mine no less pure
In heart. To me the stain sole must inure.
And so I dare reversed comparison.—
Yet like to wasted soldiers in a garrison,
Besieged and famished, daily promise dwindled
And every new delusion that my fancy kindled
Turned tawdry, as by Rumor's brass a dupe is swindled.

4.

Then fever came to burn my barriers down.
Despairing furies stormed and took the town.

The Priest of Gath in lovingkindness came
To balm with cooling hands the throbbing flame.
The balsams of the forest, mountain air
Had healed this sacrificing man of prayer,
Whose thought had ever been of aiding others,
Aspiring but amelioration of his brother's
Trials with a love exalted as a mother's.

5.

Aileen, I faint, in my great love of thee!
Bright visions vie, in gorgeous pageantry!
I see thy beauteous face as in a mist!
And lo! It bends upon me! I have kissed
A luminous dissolving nothingness!
Thus balefully doth Fancy soothe and bless
And torture with its sweetest vanishment,
Until the fiery love within the victim pent
Hath burned his heart into an ash to find its vent!

6.

But still the ember glows and so it must
Till love, its germ, with it is cold in dust.
The priestly care has gradually restored
My courage, nearly of its phials poured.
"My son," he says. "Within a passing while
I leave for Molochai, the leper isle.
That is my destiny, the voice of God
Commands me, humble as my Jesus trod,
To whose most muted whisper must I, yielding, nod."

7.

To Molochai, the isle of living death!
Where Time is but the pulsing of one breath!
"Father," said I, "And might I thus atone
For all the tares my selfishness has sown—"
"No, no," he gently put the thought aside.
"Your duty clear. It cannot be denied.
It is to find the woman, make her wife
And give the child a name; there is the end of strife;
I've planned a compensating purpose for your life."

XVII.
COMPENSATION

1.

The glasses glitter 'neath the garish blaze;
The dancers wend athwart the waltz's maze
Within the polished place of tables clear,

Where many sip the contemplative wine,
Or, more plebeian, quaff the brimming beer,
And weirdly syncopated music hear,
Where Gaiety reigns on his urban throne,
And each would hide and leave his canker care alone.

2.

The shifting moments see new revelers fed
Adown the marble stair, to gay lights led;
For San Francisco's night is second day;

The artist and the artisan but learn
Then how to make the "Western Paris" gay,
When midnight censers in the cabaret,

To Babylonian bursts of laughter burn,
And ashen Care, intolerant, dies in the urn.

3.

I sit alone, a puzzled looker-on,
A hopeful skeptic, perverse interest drawn,
Sub-conscious stirrings in my restive mind,

A premonition of events to fall,
The strange, unbidden sense that seems to find
In the Before from pangs long left Behind,
A change of fortune, as a far soul's call
In some wise penetrates the kindred spirit's wall.

4.

The dilettantes return unto their nooks
With lavish color and more froward looks,
To yield the floor to one who is to dance,
Some new and daring, gracile coryphee—
Some "La Petite Marie" from sprightly France,
Who shall recall how swift the fads advance—
A beauteous being from the wings I see,
And startle with a cry: "Aileen!"—and not "Marie!"

5.

No dramatist fantastical devised
A stranger scene than that we improvised,
As open arms to open arms we met;
She pale and momentarily overborne,
As one who sees a ghost she can't forget,
Whose heart believes, whose doubting brain not yet
Is mistress of its power, passion torn,
Rejoicing, though its habit long to mourn.

6.

And all impressions vaguely to a blur
Were interfused, except the gift of her . . .
The queries curious, the lip-curved leers,
The hum of all the titillated crowd,
The sympathy of better hearts avowed,
And though we were the cynosure of sneers,
No carmine shame we knew, for these were sacred tears.

7.

Remote, unreal, was the sweep of lights
And all confusion of a city's nights
As swiftly, soon for her retreat we sped,
And in the afterglow of sudden joy
She spoke of how she learned to deem me dead,
How hope and almost reason from her fled,
When, prisoned, by her father she was told
That one was duly dead for whom no knell was knolled.

8.

Abhorrent was the thought of life until
A baby's hands implored a sterner will;
And motived by a wild desire to flee

Her hateful home and him who caused the wreck,
By strategem she and the child were free,
Supposing quicklime were the end of me,
She followed fortune's ever casual beck,
Became the ballet, as a rose without a fleck.

9.

Next morning were we wedded by our priest:
The sun had hymned his pean from the east;
The gloried winds had blown a symphony,

And roses, roses, Beauty's incense shed:
But, joy of all! Our baby lisped to me
That sacred, loving word of ecstasy,
That gladdens gloom unto the heart that bled;
The Priest of Gath his noble benediction shed.

10.

Next morning sailed he for his dutied Gath,
For Molochai to tread the martyr's path,
To yield his life unto his fellow man;

His Christ-like spirit seemed an aureole
About his silvered brow; since Time began
No greater abnegation led the van;

One touched his robe as lepers did the stole,
The sacred white of Jesus' faith that made them whole.

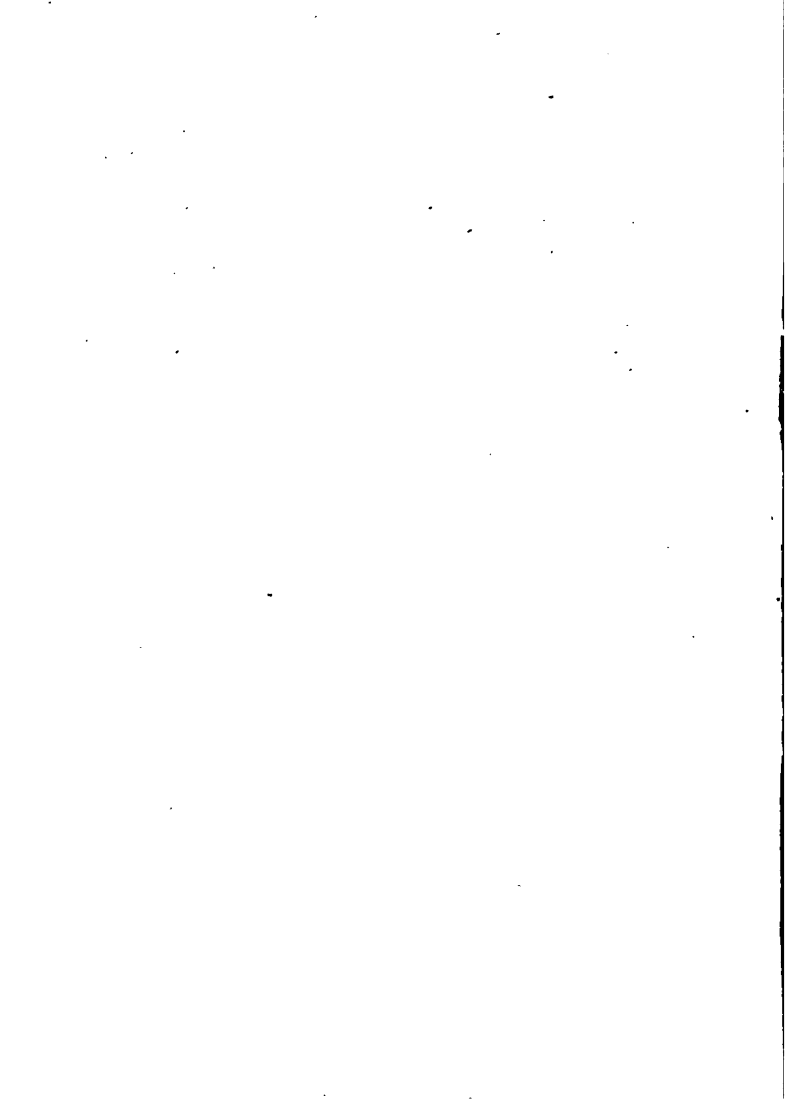
11.

He'd given me an island in the sea
Of Oceania, his by legacy,
A coral-coasted, breaker-beaten strand,

With harbor crescented for commerce calm—
One-half the copra for his lepers planned,
The other mine, the yield of pearl and palm—
Aileen a farewell wept; I pressed his hand
And boundless love he sped from eyes, sky blue and bland!

12.

And so we bade The Priest of Gath Farewell:
The steamer bore him to the vales where dwell
They who have quaffed disciples' blood and bread
Of Christ's own deathless body theirs,
One with their tissue, yea, for whom the prayers
Of saints beyond the Sinaied temple pled!—
The Priest of Gath as one a nimbus wears
And knows it not—a Grail-keeper unawares!





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